



# Portraits of Patriotism

## A Capital Victory

**J**AMES Walker's painting depicts the "Assault on Mexico City," the final drive by MG Winfield Scott's troops to capture the Mexican capital and end fighting between the two nations. The war had begun in 1846 when President James K. Polk ordered MG Zachary Taylor to seize disputed Texan land settled by Mexicans. When Mexican cavalry overwhelmed an American fortress near the Rio Grande River, Taylor pursued the enemy deep into Mexican territory.

Scott soon launched a campaign to attack Mexican forces at the coastal city of Vera Cruz. In March 1847, he oversaw the Army's first major amphibious operation and captured the city. Scott's soldiers and marines then marched inland, defeating the Mexicans in several battles along the way. On Sept. 13, his forces assaulted and captured the Chapultepec, a massive hilltop fortress outside Mexico City, then captured the capital, with his marines raising the Stars and Stripes over the so-called "palace of the Montezumas."

The U.S.-Mexican War was the United States' first "foreign" war and its first to be photographed. It was also the first in which graduates of the U.S. Military Academy participated, and was a training ground for such Civil War leaders as Robert E. Lee, Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman. In other ways, however, it was no different from most wars up to that time. More soldiers died from disease than from battle, and primitive medical techniques felled many others. Pay was poor — and the food was worse. Wrote one soldier: "When you break a biscuit, you can see it move, if the critters are not dead from eating bad flour."

Under the treaty of 1848, the victorious Americans forced Mexico to cede vast tracts of land that today comprise California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. Coupled with the 1846 acquisition of the Oregon territory from Great Britain, the U.S.-Mexican War nearly solidified the boundaries of the United States. The republic formed by 13 colonies had become a continental nation. — *CPT Patrick Swan*

